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AN OBSERVATION ON THE STYLE OF S. LUKE

BY JAMES HARDY ROPES

THE language and style of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts have been the subject of many investigations from various points of view. The unity of authorship of the two books has been argued and demonstrated from their common internal characteristics. Similarly the unity of style in the Gospel has been used to prove that it is not an expansion of the gospel used by Marcion in the second century, but rather the original which he mutilated. In the Acts the language of the so-called "we-sections" has been studied in order to show that it does not differ in character from that of the surrounding masses of the book. Furthermore, in pursuance of the suggestion contained in Paul's description of his companion Luke as "the beloved physician" (*Col.* 4, 14), the vocabulary of the writer has been searched, and with success, for words used by ancient medical writers. In general it has been recognized that in style and language Luke and Acts come nearer to the literary standard of the time than does any other of the Evangelists or the Apostle Paul.¹

On the other side, the Semitic influence in the language and style has been studied, and the Hebraisms have been found to be rather more abundant than in the other Gospels. In view of the marks of a superior Greek style which the books show this is surprising, and the cause has been variously explained. In the narratives and canticles of the first three chapters the phenomenon is especially manifest, and here

¹ Instructive because proceeding from a student of classical literature are the remarks of E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, pp. 480-492, on the style of Luke. Unfortunately, however, he has adopted his Greifswald colleague Gercke's highly improbable theory of the sources of the Book of Acts.

some have held, with doubtful right, that it points to a Semitic original from which these chapters were translated. Others have been unable to separate these chapters in this respect from the rest of the work, and have felt bound to ascribe the Hebraisms to Luke himself, in spite of his evidences of Greek literary training and his admitted Gentile birth. A holy style appropriate to holy subjects has sometimes been assumed to account for the glaring contrast between the secular style of the preface, *Luke* 1, 1-4, and the narrative immediately following included in the rest of these chapters. This could be made plausible by the fact that the author's mind was filled with the language of the Greek Old Testament, and one of the most competent students of the subject, G. Dalman, holds that the Semitic influence has come in wholly, or almost wholly, at second hand through the Septuagint, so that the Hebraisms should rather be termed "Greek-biblicisms" or "Septuagint-grecisms."

It is evident that the answer to such questions as these is of much importance for the problems of the criticism of the books. An adequate account of Luke's language and style ought to be written with ample knowledge of the non-christian literature of the period, and especially of the rhetorical principles and habits of the most widely read writers. It would require also sufficient familiarity with Hebrew and Aramaic to determine the true character and weigh the significance of the Semitic element. Such a discussion still waits.

In what follows I would call attention to a single point in Luke's use of language. The uniformity of his style is one of its striking characteristics. The similar phrases and identical words found at remote points in his great history have overwhelming force when massed in an argument for the unity of authorship, as has been frequently done and most fully by J. Friedrich (*Das Lukasevangelium und die Apostelgeschichte Werke desselben Verfassers*, 1890). But this uniformity, to which hitherto attention has been chiefly directed, is not stereotyped and mechanical. It is accompanied by great variety within the similar phrases, by a manifest fondness for change of expression, and by a notable copiousness of vocabulary in the terms used for things and actions often mentioned.

This could be illustrated from every chapter. The following examples will serve to make it clear.

(1) The writer likes to vary his word in the same context. For example :

Lk. 20, 29 ἀπέθανεν ἄτεκνος.

Lk. 20, 31 οὐ κατέλιπον τέκνα καὶ ἀπέθανον.

Acts 3, 1-8 ἀνέβαινον, εἰσπορευομένων, εἰσιέναι,¹ εἰσῆλθεν.

So in *Acts* 10 and 11, where the later chapter gives a report of the matters narrated in the earlier. Thus :

Acts 10, 12 πάντα τὰ τετράποδα καὶ ἑρπετὰ τῆς γῆς καὶ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

Acts 11, 6 τὰ τετράποδα τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ θηρία καὶ τὰ ἑρπετὰ καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

Acts 10, 14 ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἔφαγον πᾶν κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον.

Acts 11, 8 ὅτι κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον οὐδέποτε εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ στόμα μου.²

Acts 10, 16 καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνελήμφθη τὸ σκεῦος εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

Acts 11, 10 καὶ ἀνеспάσθη πάλιν ἅπαντα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

Acts 10, 20 πορεύου σὺν αὐτοῖς μηδὲν διακρινόμενος (i. e. 'not hesitating').

Acts 11, 12 συνελθεῖν αὐτοῖς μηδὲν διακρίναντα (i. e. 'making no discrimination').

(2) Similar expressions in distant contexts so often show variation that the habit must be deemed a trait of the writer's style. For example :

Lk. 1, 8 κατὰ τὸ ἔθος.

Lk. 2, 27 κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου.

Lk. 4, 16, *Acts*, 17, 2 κατὰ τὸ εἰωθός (*c. dat.*).

¹ It is noteworthy that in his effort to vary his word for 'enter' Luke has been forced to use a compound of *ἔναι*. This verb, uncompounded, is not found in the New Testament and scarcely in the Greek Old Testament; compounds are found, apart from one instance in the Epistle to the Hebrews, only in the writings of Luke, and there sparingly.

² Note that 11, 8 is not another statement of the fact mentioned in 10, 14, but a report of the same reply of Peter to the voice of God which is just before given in different words. This increases the significance of the variation.

Lk. 9, 44 θέσθε ὑμεῖς εἰς τὰ ὤτα ὑμῶν τοὺς λόγους τούτους, ὁ γὰρ υἱὸς κτλ.

Acts 2, 14 ἐνωτίσασθε τὰ ῥήματά μου· οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε κτλ.

Lk. 21, 35 ἐπὶ πρόσωπον πάσης τῆς γῆς.

Acts 17, 26 ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς.

Acts 2, 11 λαλούντων . . . τὰ μεγαλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

Acts 10, 46 μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν.

Lk. 1, 65 f. διελαλίετο πάντα τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα καὶ ἔθεντο . . . ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν.

Lk. 2, 19 πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα συνβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς.

Acts 2, 45 καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διμερίζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρειᾷν εἶχεν.

Acts 4, 34 ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκῶν ὑπῆρχον ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων . . . διεδίδετο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἂν τις χρειᾷν εἶχεν.

Acts 2, 47 ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σωζομένους καθ' ἡμέραν.

Acts 5, 14 μᾶλλον δὲ προσετίθεντο πιστεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ πλήθῃ ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν.

Acts 6, 7 καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἠύξανεν, καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα.

Acts 11, 21 πολὺς τε ἀριθμὸς ὁ πιστεύσας ἐπίστρεψεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον.

Acts 12, 24 ὁ δὲ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο.

Acts 16, 5 καὶ ἐπερίσσεον τῷ ἀριθμῷ καθ' ἡμέραν.

Acts 17, 4 καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπείσθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σίλᾳ.

Acts 19, 20 οὕτως κατὰ κράτος τοῦ κυρίου ὁ λόγος ἠύξανεν καὶ ἴσχυεν.

Lk. 24, 26 οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστόν καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ.

Acts 9, 20 ἐκήρυσεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

Acts 9, 22 συνβιβάζων ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός.

Acts 17, 3 παρατιθέμενος ὅτι τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός, ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

Acts 18, 5 διαμαρτυρούμενος τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Acts 18, 28 ἐπιδεικνὺς διὰ τῶν γραφῶν εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Acts 26, 23 εἰ παθητὸς ὁ χριστός.

Acts 22, 3 πεπαιδευμένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρῴου νόμου, ζῆλων τῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ.

Acts 26, 5 κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἵρεσιν τῆς ἡμετέρας θρησκείας ἔζησα Φαρισαῖος.

Acts 1, 23 ὃς ἐπεκλήθη Ἰούστος.

Acts 12, 12 τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου Μάρκον.

Acts 12, 25 τὸν ἐπικληθέντα Μάρκον.

Acts 15, 37 τὸν καλούμενον Μάρκον.

These examples will, I think, be convincing, and they could be multiplied indefinitely. We have here a mental trait of the writer, a mark of his taste. He likes to vary, and his variation shows a literary feeling and gives his writing a certain elegance.¹

(3) If this is true it is perhaps not going too far to connect with this trait certain more substantial variations. Luke is fond of repeating his material. Thus *Lk. 24, 44-53* and the use with differences of the same material in *Acts 1, 1-12*; the two lists of apostles in *Lk. 6, 14 ff.* and *Acts 1, 13*; the three accounts of the conversion of Paul in *Acts 9, 22* and *26*, with their notorious divergences of statement; the repetition of the Cornelius incident of *Acts 10* with additions and changes in the report of chapter *11*; the repetition of Paul's speeches in *Acts 22, 3-5, 23, 6* and *26, 4-10*; the repetition of *Acts 22, 23-29* in the letter of Claudius Lysias, *Acts 24, 26-30*, with, as is sometimes alleged, offi-

¹ A good example of Luke's feeling for variety of form in a series is to be seen in *Acts 2, 9-11*, where the variations produce an agreeable suggestion of rhythm. Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἑλαμίται, καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καπαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, Φρυγίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν, Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, Ἰουδαῖοι τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρήτες καὶ Ἀραβες. The same thing is to be found in Aelian and Philostratus. See W. Schmid, *Der Atticismus*, III, 317, IV, 479, 524, where abundant illustrations from these authors are given.

cial misrepresentation of facts, — all these instances testify to his fondness for repetition, and nearly all to his tendency to vary even facts of some importance when rehearsing a story for the second time.

Now the bearing of my observation is this. If this tendency to vary is a trait of Luke, these variations must not be used, as some of them often have been, as marks of written sources slavishly followed and worked up into a patchwork like the Hexateuch in the Old Testament. For instance, the shifting use of *Ἱερουσαλήμ* and *Ἱεροσόλυμα* in *Acts* has been observed, and attempts made to use it as a criterion for the analysis into sources. In this particular case the attempts have failed, and probably the two forms owe their adoption to the changing fancy of the writer in each several instance. So of the two accounts of the "communism," and the three of Paul's conversion. Indeed, it ought to be said that it still remains to be proved that the writer of *Acts* used any written sources. The alleged (and in some quarters much vaunted) agreement of the makers of *Quellenscheidungen* as to the existence of certain rifts in the mass in which their picks and wedges can take hold, amounts in *Acts* 1-14 to scarcely more than the rather obvious fact that these chapters contain several blocks of more or less connected narratives. Whether any of these blocks had ever been in written form before is a fundamental problem to which the analyzers usually have no leisure to address themselves. And in *Acts* 15-28 the agreement in the analysis is really an agreement as to which of the statements are historically trustworthy, and which not. The point which I have tried to make in this article, if well taken, makes the work of analysis somewhat less hopeful. Variation of expression in *Luke* and *Acts*, at any rate when of a certain kind, indicates rather unity than diversity of authorship. Nor, it may be added, do such discrepancies show the untrustworthiness of the statements of the writer. They have neither the one significance nor the other, but are merely a part of his mode of writing history, introduced in order to avoid a monotonous uniformity.

On the interpretation of one important passage, too, this observation seems to me to throw some light. I refer to *Lk.* 1, 4, *ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν*. This is often made to mean 'know the certainty, or trustworthiness, of the accounts which thou hast received.' So Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, II, p. 360, says that Theophilus is to be led to a conviction "von der Zuverlässig-

keit der Reden, von welchen er Kunde bekommen hatte." But twice in *Acts* (21, 34 ; 22, 30) the similar expression γινῶναι τὸ ἀσφαλές is used in the plain sense "gain sure and certain knowledge." In view of Luke's fondness for varying his phrase it seems justifiable to interpret *Lk.* 1, 4 by these later passages as meaning 'that thou mightest have sure and certain knowledge concerning those matters of which thou hast heard.' This suits the context better, for the mere repetition of the story by Luke would not convince of its trustworthiness, but can well be said to supply full and accurate knowledge of the matters treated. There is thus no explanation here of the mystery of the writer's supposed deep and subtle purpose in his work ; there is indeed no suggestion that there was any such mystery.